A Rare Advantage to Kryptonite Exposure

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A Rare Advantage to Kryptonite Exposure

by Kantayra

Summary

A close call with Kryptonite causes Clark to see a side of Lex he'd long thought dead...

Notes

Somehow Lana spontaneously popped out of existence in this fic. Oops. I think she ran back to Paris in the S6 premiere or something. :P Written for Round IV of slashfest. Based off of a request by iamtheenemy for *"Clark/Lex h/c with Clark somehow sick/worn out/emotionally hurt, with Lex comforting/defending/ rescuing him."* Originally posted here. Unbeta'ed, so forgive any errors.

Clark didn't exactly know what would happen if a bullet hit him squarely in the forehead while he was weakened under the effects of the meteor rocks. When he was punched or slammed into walls around the stuff, he felt pain maybe the same way humans did. Did that mean that, if he was shot, it would kill him just like anyone else?

Thankfully, today was not the day that particular experiment would be carried out.

He staggered against the doorway, one hand catching the frame to hold himself upright. He still wasn't sure if it was blind luck or malicious foreknowledge that had caused the attackers to flee through Lex Luthor's personal vault of refined Kryptonite, or to set off a detonator in their wake. In either case, it was the only chance the two assassins had possibly had of escaping once Clark arrived on the scene.

He'd forgotten about the third, though. Still wheezing and fighting past the pain, he'd had one moment to freeze in the doorframe before the third man – apparently recovered from being thrown into the far wall – raised his gun and…

Something hit Clark, hard. He had one moment to contemplate the impossible – as close to mortality as he'd yet gotten – and then the gunshot echoed through the castle, and Clark fell to the ground beneath his savior.

"Oof." There was a pained wheeze above him, and then two more shots. Thankfully, they were behind the table now, and both bullets were easily deflected with the sharp clang of metal.

"Lex?" The dizziness receded as the doors to the vault closed with a mechanical 'whoosh'. Thankfully, Lex was lining everything with lead these days as a precautionary measure. Already, Clark's strength was returning.

"Stay down." Lex's arm was still bleeding from the initial hit he'd taken. Somehow, thanks to some Lexian feat of indomitable will, he'd managed to get hold of a gun and keep it in his injured hand through that entire heroic act.

It was a strange moment of clarity for Clark. This Lex and the one he'd been in conflict with only days ago and the one who'd been his best friend years before that, all blended into one picture. And there was no difference, really. Just Lex.

“Lex…” Suddenly, he was feeling very woozy, and he wondered whether that explosion earlier when the first two assailants fled might have done more damage than he initially thought. He couldn’t really feel his body, like everything was numb.

More shots echoed against the stone walls, and Clark had just enough presence to mind to realize that Lex was firing too. And then there was a groan across the room, and Lex rose to his feet, shouting into his comm. unit that they needed security *now*.

The last thing Clark registered before he slipped into blissful unconsciousness was that Lex was back, kneeling before him, face pale and arm still bleeding, calling out, “Clark? Clark! *Clark*!” over and over again.

It was nice to know that, after all these years, Lex still cared…

***

Clark awoke, rolled over, and threw up.

It was probably the most miserable awakening of his entire life. It wasn’t until he’d finished purging his stomach that he realized that at least he’d thrown up into a receptacle rather than all over the bed.

“Shh, shh, it’s okay…”

Warm fingers trailed down his back, and Clark suddenly realized that he was *freezing*. Long shivers raked through his body, and the movement made *everything* ache. His insides felt like they were being ripped apart and twisted inside him, and he heaved again into the wastebasket.

“Clark?” The hand on Clark’s back moved to his forehead. “You’re burning up…”

And that couldn’t be right, because he was going to *die* from the cold. He barely had any strength to move, but he managed to lean into that hand, into the body seated at the edge of the bed. “Please…” he whispered through chattering teeth. “So cold…”

“You’ll still bleeding, too.” Clark felt a fresh gasp of pain at his shoulder as a bandage was peeled back. A ponderous silence followed. “This can’t be right…” Lex sounded perplexed and very worried.

“Hurts…” Clark fought the word out. “Mom…”

“Your mother’s in Topeka,” Lex reminded him, not unkindly. “I called her immediately. Unfortunately, the blizzard has closed every airport in Kansas.”

Clark cursed in Kryptonian under his breath.

“The sheriff’s department has stopped prying into the shooting for now,” Lex continued shakily, mindless chatter while he replaced the blood-soaked bandage on Clark’s shoulder. “I gave them my statement. They don’t know you were here. And, thankfully, I was shot so there shouldn’t be much inquiry into the assassin I killed.”

The sting of antiseptic hit Clark’s wound, and it was the most painful thing he’d ever experienced, yet he was so weak he could barely manage more than a whimper. God, how did humans survive? How could *Lex*, who had a bullet to the arm right now, bear the pain enough to even *breathe*, let alone talk and take care of Clark’s wounds?

He managed to raise impossibly heavy eyelids to look at Lex. The expression on Lex’s face was almost enough to make him sick again. Lex looked *terrified*, like something horrible was about to happen. It was something so bad that *Lex* was freaking out. Oh, God. Clark was going to die, wasn’t he?

“Clark?” Lex’s voice sounded raspy and unsure, very un-Lex-like, especially given the cold confidence that had governed his every move of late. “I know there’s something wrong. You should be healing… faster than this. *I* heal faster than this.”

Clark managed to shake his head weakly. “Mom…”

“Your mom heals you?” Lex inquired skeptically.

Clark shook his head again. “Mom’ll know what to do.”

Lex let out a frustrated sigh. “Ah. Of course. You’d rather die waiting for your mother than tell me.” He took what sounded like a deep, calming breath. “What if I called Chloe? Would she know?”

And something about the fact that Lex would even *offer* to go get someone Clark trusted struck Clark just then. Lex was trying to help him. Clark was dying, and Lex didn’t want Clark to die (which, frankly, was a bit of a surprise, Clark had to admit), and Lex was willing to put *everything* that had happened between them aside to save Clark.

For some reason, all that made Clark feel *really* stupid all of a sudden.

“Lex?” Clark whined piteously.

Lex was talking into his phone angrily, teeth crisp and sharp over his consonants. Clark was fading so quickly now that he couldn’t even make out Lex’s words. Maybe he was calling Chloe. Maybe…

“What, Clark?”

Clark put all his energy into focusing on his words. On Lex. “Kryptonite…”

“Krypto-what?”

Of course. Lex didn’t even *know* the term. Clark would’ve laughed if another wave of pain and nausea hadn’t come over him just then. It felt like his blood was boiling from within, and his entire body clenched and retched. He probably had those ugly green-black veins anyway; Lex would already know something was up.

“R-Rocks…”

“Rocks?” Lex frowned. “Meteor rocks?”

Clark grunted in what he hoped was a clear affirmative.

“Meteor rocks heal you?”

Clark grunted again. Amazingly, Lex managed to interpret it.

“No… They hurt you? So…” Something clicked in Lex’s eyes. “The explosion. Chips of the refined meteor rock must have gotten into your wounds. We have to get them out.” Instantly, he was on his feet, rummaging through the First Aid kit by the dresser.

Clark really wanted to say something about how smart and wonderful Lex was, but instead he fainted again. It just wasn’t his best day.

***

In the summer after sixth grade, before he could get braces, Pete had to have four of his molars removed. Pete had vanished for two weeks after the actual tooth-pulling had occurred, and Mrs. Ross had informed Clark every day during those two weeks that Pete was in too much pain to even talk to him. When Pete finally *had* been well enough to come out and play again, he’d regaled Clark and Chloe with

horror stories about how with each pull he could feel bone and muscle ripping. Then, the dentists had stuck sharp instruments into the gaping void where his tooth had been and prodded all the most painful spots while they dug out the root. The Novocain did nothing, Pete insisted, nothing to block the agony and nothing to stop the sharp ache all over his mouth for the next two weeks.

If the feeling of Lex prying the fragments of Kryptonite from his back was *anything* like what Pete had experienced, Clark was going to take back every mean thing he'd ever said about Pete and buy him pizza every day until he was forty.

"Hold still," Lex hissed, more than a little frustrated, but still in control, as always.

"Can't…"

The pliers dug into Clark's back, and he screamed, long and loud.

"Shh, shh, shh…" Lex's voice was soft in his ear again, soothing. It shouldn't have been able to penetrate all the pain, but somehow it did. Clark's hand reached out blindly and found the back of Lex's knee where he was kneeling over Clark to pluck the shards from his back. Touching Lex made it better, bearable. If Clark had been at his full strength, he probably would be snapping Lex's bones right now, his grip was so tight.

The pliers dug back in, and Clark whimpered, and Lex let out a little exclamation of victory.

"Another one out. That's four." Lex's palm rubbed gentle circles into the small of Clark's back, soothing him down from the pain. "Is that all of them?"

Clark almost said yes. Because *nothing* could be worse than the feel of metal pincers inside his flesh, digging and twisting and tormenting him. The regular burn of Kryptonite was just a minor inconvenience compared to the intrusion of the pliers. Sure, he'd die, but he'd die only in extreme pain, rather than blinding pain. Each place where Lex had removed a shard felt as though a drill had ripped through tissue and muscle. He wasn't sure he could take another…

"Still some left," he finally said weakly. He thought it was probably the bravest thing he'd ever said.

By the way Lex stilled, he seemed to think so, too. "This will be the

last one." The way he said it made it concrete fact; the universe wouldn't *dare* defy a Luthor when he spoke with *that* tone of voice.

There was a certain irony to the fact that the very thing that had scared Clark the most about Lex mere days ago now gave him the most hope. He nodded and gritted his teeth. "Do it."

The metal tip was on his skin again, prodding gently here and there, waiting for Clark's cry of pain so Lex would know where to dig. Clark almost wished that Lex really did hate him just then, because at least then *Lex* would be enjoying himself. However, the fact that Lex was pulling bloody chunks of Kryptonite from his back in order to save his life kind of blew that whole 'he hates me' theory to hell.

Clark felt tears welling up in his eyes as flayed flesh was poked and prodded. In so many ways, this was his worst nightmare: helpless to fight, impossibly sick from Kryptonite, Lex probing him with sharp metal instruments. The irony, of course, was that Lex was finally doing all this to save him, not to hurt him. He'd always had that problem with Lex; he would let his imagination run away and come up with the absolute worst possible scenario. The reality of Lex had never yet lived up to the horrors in his head.

Clark was torn from his introspection by searing waves of pain. He tried to scream, but his voice was hoarse, and all that came out was a croak.

"I think I see it. Just a few more minutes," Lex encouraged him, and then the pliers were in his back once again.

Clark decided then and there that it didn't matter whether or not Lex had him chained up in some lab to do an alien autopsy on him: this was hell. There simply couldn't be anything more horrible…

Maybe Lex *did* hate him, after all. Maybe this was torture for all those times Clark had lied to him. Maybe Lex was just returning the favor because, in the end, Clark hadn't been able to save Lex. Maybe…

Maybe.

***

"I really wish I'd videotaped that."

When Clark came to, the pain was gone. That had to mean that Lex had gotten all the Kryptonite out, which meant… Oh, damn. Clark

remembered very well his parents' tale of what it had looked like after they'd removed the Kryptonite bullet from him that one time: flesh miraculously sewing back together until his skin was perfect and unblemished once more. Lex probably *was* kicking himself for not getting scientific evidence. Maybe this was it: Lex would try to recreate the injuries, and this agony would be Clark's future from here on. Or maybe he should stop being paranoid. After all, he wasn't dying. That was already a step up.

"Ungh?" he groaned against the pillow. His mouth was impossibly dry.

"You've fainted like a girl more times this afternoon than I've managed to get knocked over the head during my entire time in Smallville. I could blackmail you for life with that kind of embarrassing footage."

Somewhere over the years, Clark had lost the ability to tell whether Lex was joking or not. He took a risk now, prayed to God that Lex was just teasing him, and offered a strained chuckle into his pillow.

The ghost of a smile danced across Lex's lips in response. Good. Clark had guessed right. "You sound better." Lex's voice was almost clinical now, but his hand reached out and gently pushed the hair back from Clark's forehead, testing the temperature there before carding through sweaty, tangled curls. "And your fever's gone. Is there anything else I should do?"

Clark sighed. He still felt cold, and Lex was warm and soft. To his disappointment, Lex's hand left him and returned to the tray on the bedside table. A little metal container sat there, and Clark didn't need his x-ray vision to know that it was lead. He felt a shiver run through him in memory of the pain the fragments inside had caused him. "I'll get better on my own now." His voice cracked, dry and broken.

Silence followed, and then more warmth. Impossibly wonderful warmth. And wet too. Clark may have made a sound embarrassingly similar to a purr when Lex scrubbed the wet washcloth up and down his healed back, wiping up all the caked blood there.

"Incredible," Lex breathed, and Clark could only assume that Lex was talking about his healing abilities.

He murmured something that was vaguely affirmative and let his eyes drift closed comfortably as Lex continued to make warm, wet swipes across his back. Mentally, he slapped himself for *ever* thinking that Lex

might be evil; Lex was an absolute *saint*, and Clark might have to marry him after all this was over. Except that this was Kansas and they were both men. Drat.

“Do you always heal like this?” Lex asked curiously, rubbing the cloth over the curve of Clark’s hip. Clark wasn’t sure where his shirt and jeans had gone, but he was suddenly very aware that he was wearing nothing but boxers.

“Usually I don’t even get hurt in the first place,” he answered sleepily. The nightmare part of the evening was officially over, and now came the lovely wet dream. Clark figured he deserved it after what he’d been through.

“And it doesn’t hurt at all now?”

“Well,” Clark conceded, “I’ll probably be under-the-weather for the next couple of days. Mom says it’s like a mild flu.”

“That seems little price to pay.” Lex was making small talk for no reason, which would have puzzled Clark if Lex’s voice weren’t so deep and rumbly and relaxing. Clark thought right then that he’d really like to fall asleep some time to the sound of Lex’s voice. Now seemed like a good opportunity.

The washcloth left Clark’s back, and a towel took its place, drying his skin. “Mmm, warm…”

“Are you cold?” Lex’s tone was polite and careful, as if he were just now realizing that his rapid rush to Clark’s rescue was no longer really in keeping with their relationship. Clark took a moment to mourn that. For a while there, it had been like having his best friend back. Clark missed knowing that, no matter what, he always had Lex to fall back on.

“Mmm.”

“I’ll get you a hot water bottle.”

Clark’s hand reached out to catch Lex’s wrist. “Don’t go,” he whined in a piteous tone that had long ago been cultivated to melt even the hardest of hearts. He added in a sniffle he only half needed, just for effect.

Lex sat back down. “I’ll call Enrique and have *him* bring you a hot water bottle,” he amended.

“And orange juice.”

“And orange juice,” Lex agreed.

Clark nuzzled happily into the pillows, his battle won for the moment.

Lex spoke in hushed tones into the telephone and then hung up. Then, he walked over to the bathroom and returned with toothbrush and toothpaste and mouthwash, and Clark hadn’t realized until then just how nasty his mouth felt. He brushed and gargled until all the filth from earlier was gone, and all he could taste was the clean scent of mint.

Lex bustled about, cleaning up after him, restoring everything to its proper place. There was something kind of cute about Lex acting like a mother hen, and Clark couldn’t help but smile to himself as Lex finished and sat down at the edge of the bed once again. Lex didn’t ask, but reached over to brush his fingers through Clark’s hair yet again. It was possibly the most wonderful feeling Clark had ever felt.

The two of them sat in silence like that for quite a while before one of the maids arrived with the items Clark had requested. Clark drank his juice in one long gulp and curled himself around the water bottle. It was nice and warm, but not quite as warm as Lex.

“I take it you’re not planning to return home this evening, then?”

Lex’s casual question made Clark feel cold all over, and not in a way that any water bottle could cure. He remembered (and when had he forgotten in the first place, exactly?) that Lex had banned him from his home. Clark wasn’t supposed to be here, wasn’t welcome, and for the first time the *tragedy* of that really hit him.

“With the storm and your illness, of course, it only makes sense that you’d stay,” Lex continued in that emotionless tone.

If Clark hadn’t heard Lex all but hysterical only hours ago over Clark’s life, he wouldn’t have believed that it had happened from the way Lex was acting now. “I want to stay.” He figured he should probably say something more. Like always with Lex, there were about a dozen different levels to this conversation, and Clark never knew how to return the subtext in kind. Given that his head was feeling pretty stuffy at the moment, he didn’t even bother to try. “I’m sleepy.”

“Of course.” Lex rose in one graceful motion, smooth and sleek like quicksilver. “I’ll let you get some rest. If you need—”

“Lex?” Clark cut him off, unable to handle any more *politeness* just then.

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

Lex’s lips pursed, like he was considering that statement very carefully. “You’re welcome.”

“I missed you.”

For one moment the mask that Lex always wore dropped, and Clark could see the raw *ache* on Lex’s face, like Lex had been desperately hoping to hear those words for so long that he’d never imagined he’d get them. And then, the next second, Lex was calm and collected and *Lex* again. “I missed you, too.”

No matter how hard he tried, though, he couldn’t keep his voice cool for that statement.

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Life, Clark concluded when he woke some time later that evening, was pretty good.

The room Lex had put him in had a big, warm fireplace. From where Clark lay, he could see soft, wet snowflakes brushing against the stained glass as the storm continued to whistle and howl outside. The only thing that could make a comfortable bed and a fireplace any better was knowing that it was cold and uncomfortable outside and he didn’t have to go out.

Mumbling happily against sheets that surprised him by being white and cotton (although they were still sinfully, luxuriously soft), Clark rolled over onto his back to have a better look at his surroundings.

The first thing he saw, of course, was Lex.

The room had clearly been an unoccupied guest room, given that all the bookshelves were bare. Lex had moved into the desk in the corner quickly, however. He had his back to Clark and was surrounded by stacks of manila folders, typing lackadaisically at his laptop. Clark took a few minutes to savor the sight of Lex, unaware and unguarded, before he mumbled again, more coherently this time, to get Lex’s attention.

Lex spun his chair around to face Clark, casual, in control once more. “You’re awake.”

If Clark wanted to be annoying, he could ask Lex what he was doing in Clark’s room. It would put Lex on the defensive and would remove that knowing little smile from Lex’s face. It would also piss Lex off a whole lot. Amazing, really, that he’d only had Lex’s attention for two seconds now, and already their conversation was like trying to weave his way through an endless maze.

He wondered sometimes how he’d managed it when he was only fifteen. Part of him figured that Lex must’ve been different then, less complex and less guarded. Another part of him, however, wondered if the change was in himself: more suspicious, less open, less natural. The answer was probably a combination of both.

“Mmm-hmm,” was all he said in the end.

“It’s almost nine.” Lex consulted his watch. “Are you hungry?”

“God, yes.” Clark’s answer came almost before the question was even asked.

Lex smiled a small smile, eyes downcast. “I guess that proves that you’re not dying, then.”

Clark snickered.

Lex’s smile turned a few shades more enthusiastic, and he called dinner in.

It felt very homey, lying there amidst warm, soft pillows, the fire glinting off the window panes, Lex’s laughter rich in the air. *I could get used to this…*

As soon as the thought entered Clark’s head, though, the spell was broken. Because no matter how much he might want to pretend things were otherwise, Lex was still running illegal experiments and causing people to ‘vanish’ and engaging in heaven only knew how many hostile take-overs at the moment. The fact that they were both a little nostalgic for a time when they’d been younger and happier didn’t change any of that.

“You saved my life this afternoon,” Lex commented, expression closed.

“More like I got in the way while you saved yourself,” Clark retorted.

“I highly doubt that matters would’ve turned out so favorably if you hadn’t chased off those two men.”

What had happened to the third remained unspoken. Clark dimly recalled feverish memories wherein Lex had mentioned that he’d killed the third assassin. From the look in Lex’s eyes, it didn’t bother him in the slightest that he’d taken a life less than eight hours ago.

Clark really didn’t want to think about any of this. Instead, he asked the safe question: “Did the sheriff’s department ever find the two who escaped?”

Lex snorted derisively. “No, it seemed beyond the sheriff’s capabilities to follow footprints through the snow. My security staff caught them down off County Road C, however.”

“Your *security staff* can follow footprints through the snow?” Clark retorted in stunned disbelief.

They held each other’s gaze for a few seconds, before – as if one cue – they both burst out laughing.

They were still giggling, a bit giddily perhaps, when the food arrived. Clark didn’t recognize the servant who brought their food. Just that he was cute and young and had an ass that even *Clark* envied and he kept checking Lex out when Lex wasn’t looking. Clark wondered if his heat vision had recovered yet and, if so, just how bad a sin it would be to set the guy’s feet on fire. Probably pretty bad.

However, Lex seemed entirely oblivious to the boy in that true Lex fashion that had allowed him to be kidnapped by dozens of crazed stalkers. He took the tray without his eyes leaving Clark for a moment, despite the other eye-candy in the room. Something about that made Clark feel warm inside in an entirely different way than the blankets and fire and hot water bottle ever could. The servant, looking somewhat dejected that what *had* to be a meteor-enhanced ass hadn’t turned Lex’s eye, left them alone.

“I see Henri remembered all your favorites,” Lex commented dryly as he set up Clark’s tray on the bed.

Clark watched Lex fuss with his place setting, getting all the silverware set up exactly right, with a sudden bout of insurmountable fondness. Before he could even think about what he was doing, his hand reached out to capture Lex’s darting fingers, tangling the two of them together.

Lex froze and stared down at their joined hands. “Clark?”

“I…” Clark didn’t know what to say. He settled for letting go of Lex’s hand and snatching up his fork instead; Henri always made the *best* pork chops.

Lex watched him for a moment before he sat down on the edge of the bed and began picking at the food on his own tray, which was now perched on the bedside table.

Clark frowned. “You didn’t wait for me to wake up before you ate, did you?”

Lex looked startled at that. “Wait for you? Oh, no. I didn’t.” He tore off a small piece of bread and nibbled at it half-heartedly.

The implication was clear enough: if Clark hadn’t been there, Lex wouldn’t even be eating now. There was some part of Lex – probably the part that had lost his mother far too young – that had never quite learned how to take care of itself. Food, warmth, affection, comfort – all of them were things that Lex would starve himself of if not properly pushed. There had always been a sort of sadness to that, and Clark had hoped when they first became friends that maybe his own mom would step in and help Lex take care of himself better. It had never happened, though.

In a way, they’d both let each other down. Lex had failed to grow into the man Clark had seen him becoming, and Clark had failed to provide the support network Lex needed to be truly satisfied.

Clark devoured his entire meal and most of Lex’s, while Lex continued to pick at his bread like a bird.

They didn’t say anything.

***

“What are you reading?”

Clark woke up at heaven only knew what hour of the night to find Lex still awake, still seated awkwardly on the very corner of the bed, huddled over some papers in his lap intently. Lex started when he spoke, and the top two papers went flying, but Lex caught them deftly mid-air and returned them to the stack like nothing had happened.

“Quarterly earnings reports.”

Clark made a face.

Lex's expression closed off. "Fine, don't believe me. Just remember: I *do* run a multi-national corporation, and—"

"Lex?" Clark cut him off.

"What?" Lex demanded.

"I believe you."

Blue-gray eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Just like that?"

"You can't fake that kind of boredom," Clark retorted with what he hoped was an adorably innocent grin.

Lex softened immediately under the power of that smile. Clark thought he was starting to remember how to talk to Lex again. It was getting easier to tease him without his imagination running away with ridiculous ways Lex might seek vengeance.

"Thank God," Lex smiled, leaning back, the slightest of smiles curling his lips. "I was about to go into a coma."

Clark giggled and scootched over to give Lex more room on the foot of the bed. "So, entertain me," he demanded.

Lex quirked an eyebrow at him. "Aren't you supposed to be sleeping?"

"*I'm* bored. And I slept all day." Clark considered for a moment. "And can I have more orange juice?"

A brilliant smile lit up Lex's face, one of those delightfully mischievous ones that made Clark feel like he was the only being in all the universe who had ever made Lex Luthor laugh. A buzzer had been set up in the room while Clark was sleeping, and Lex hit that before dropping the pile of files back on his desk. He gave Clark a wink, put one finger to his lips to warn for silence, and opened up his briefcase.

Lex typed in a security code, and the latches unfastened. Then, forcing his face into the most serious expression he could manage given that he was trying very hard not to laugh, he looked Clark right in the eye. "Before this goes any further, I need you to swear that whatever you see here tonight never leaves this room."

Clark looked at him and then the briefcase curiously; it had been years

and years since he'd seen Lex playful like this. "Why?" he finally asked.

"Your word first," Lex insisted.

Clark considered. Given the way Lex's eyes were twinkling, it seemed very unlikely that whatever Lex was going to show him was even remotely illegal. The fact that Lex would even joke about the secrecy of some of his highly suspect projects startled Clark. Perhaps Lex's inner nerd wasn't buried as far down beneath that cold veneer as Clark had imagined. Eventually, curiosity got the better of him. "Fine. I promise."

Lex smiled and slunk – because there really was no better word for the graceful, flowing motion of Lex's hips – down onto the bed beside Clark, briefcase in hand. Clark half sat up to see what Lex was doing. Pursing his lips in what was meant to be another hush but made Clark think of lots of really naughty and inappropriate things, Lex tapped the inside wall of his briefcase to reveal a secret panel.

Clark tensed for a moment, wondering if that smile of Lex's was more that of a cat who was toying with a mouse than that of one friend to another. Almost as if Lex could read Clark's thoughts, his grin turned more shark-like.

He opened the panel and removed—

"Jerk," Clark rolled his eyes and nudged Lex's shoulder when nothing more dangerous than the two most recent issues of Warrior Angel emerged.

"What?" Lex retorted innocently. "I've got a cutthroat reputation to maintain! If my competitors found out…"

Clark didn't hear the rest of Lex's defense because he was laughing so hard, face pressed into Lex's shoulder, impossibly soft fabrics that Clark couldn't even identify and warm muscle and the exotic scent of *Lex*. Clark had forgotten what it felt like to be this close, this intimate.

By the way Lex stilled and then cautiously reached over to pat at Clark's hair, he'd forgotten as well.

It had the potential to turn very awkward, very fast. Luckily, Clark was sick and had the ultimate 'get out of jail free' card. "Read to me," he requested in the most piteous voice he could manage.

Lex flipped open the November issue and proceeded to do just that. There was a hazy, safe place that existed only in Clark's mind when Lex's voice, firm and even, read aloud. He accepted his orange juice from the cute servant, his cheek never leaving Lex's shoulder, with what was probably an insufferably smug smile on his face. The boy glared at him in a totally unprofessional way before leaving them alone again.

Somewhere mid-December, Clark's eyes drifted closed again, and his head slipped from Lex's shoulder down to his lap. Images of costumed heroes and villains still dancing together against the backs of his eyelids, he suddenly realized that maybe he wasn't so awake after all…

***

When Clark woke up, *Lex* was asleep, which was a nice change, for once. At some point during the night, Lex had set the precious comics safely on the nightstand and tucked himself under the blankets beside Clark. Clark's head had found its way into the curve of Lex's throat, and Lex's arm looped casually about Clark's waist. Clark's earlier surmise was correct: Lex *was* better than any hot water bottle known to mankind.

Clark shifted slightly, carefully, until he could see Lex's sleeping face. It was light outside now, the faded sunbeams coming in through colored panes of glass. The snow seemed to have stopped, although Clark could see that it had piled almost a foot up on the windowsill, a perfect lazy winter morning.

The watch on Lex's wrist indicated at it was only a little before 9:30, so Clark didn't worry about getting up. Instead, he allowed himself a good, long think, fingers tracing the lines of Lex's sleeping countenance in the air above Lex's skin. He hadn't worked up the courage yet to wake Lex with his touch.

Watching Lex sleep was something of a revelation. However aloof he might pretend to be when he was awake, Lex's subconscious couldn't hide his affection for Clark. Whenever Clark shifted, Lex instinctively moved to close the gap.

Clark now realized why he'd never fully gotten his relationship with Lex before. He'd known they were best friends, closer than brothers in many ways. But he'd never gotten just how impossibly close they were to becoming lovers, as well. It was the sort of thing that just wouldn't

have occurred to Clark when he was younger and a hell of a lot more oblivious. Lex must've seen it, though. While Clark had lost a friend, Lex had lost so much more…

The knowledge was shocking, like one of those Magic Eye pictures, where you could stare at it for hours and hours before suddenly the picture within revealed itself. Clark felt kind of silly that it had taken all of this, up to and including waking up to the feel of Lex's hardness brushing his thigh, to put all of the pieces together.

Now that he'd thought of it, though, he was surprised at how very not averse to the idea he was. In fact, he didn't think he ever would have objected, even when he was fifteen. No matter what happened, Lex had been telling him the truth that there was *something* there between them. Destiny was probably as good a word as any.

Clark's fingers finally came to rest along the curve of Lex's throat. Soft, warm flesh beneath his palm, and then he felt Lex's pulse strengthen as his breathing changed.

"Good morning," Clark whispered as Lex's eyes opened sleepily.

"Mmm, Clark." Either Lex wasn't quite awake yet or he didn't really care how unusual this circumstance was. He leaned in the scant few inches between them and brushed his lips against Clark's almost casually, like their first kiss was the most natural thing in the world.

Clark licked his lips and gulped.

"How are you feeling?" Lex inquired. That meant that he was very aware of his surroundings and what had happened yesterday, which in turn meant that…

Clark answered by catching Lex's face between his palms and kissing him *hard*. His aim was off at first and only caught the edge of Lex's lips, but it was a mistake quickly rectified. The inside of Lex's mouth was warm and luxuriant and sweet, which really should've been impossible unless Lex's meteor powers extended to good morning breath. Although the way Lex was sucking on Clark's tongue made Clark think that they probably just really liked each other's taste.

It was instinctual from there to twine and draw closer, to line their bodies up so that their erections pressed together through soft fabric, to rub erotically. Clark's hand slid between them and pushed at the waistband of his boxers, desperate to remove any barrier to Lex's soft skin.

Lex let out a little gasp and pulled his lips away, eyes half closed so that he looked like he was in a dreamlike state. “We shouldn’t,” he offered halfheartedly. He was fumbling with his pants now, and the backs of his knuckles brushed Clark’s.

“Why not?” Clark pulled Lex in tighter once both their underwear was gone, and their cocks touched, skin on skin for the first time.

Lex’s eyes rolled back in his head, and he groaned in ecstasy. “Point.”

Clark’s hands went for the buttons of Lex’s shirt, wanting nothing between them for once. His lips found Lex’s bared collarbone and nipped and licked, eliciting wonderful little growling noises from the back of Lex’s throat.

And then Lex’s hand got between them somehow, despite all the thrusting, and his fingers wrapped around both their erections, pulling them together in a fast, rough rhythm. That was about the time that Clark concluded that Lex was an absolute *genius* when it came to sex, and Clark wanted nothing more than to experience Lex’s brilliance every day for the rest of his life.

When he tried to verbalize those thoughts, however, they came out more as: “Guh! *Guuuuhh*!”

Lex’s free hand caught his wrist and guided him down to where their two cocks pressed together. Clark’s hand latched on to Lex’s, and together they formed the perfect little tunnel for the two of them to thrust into. Clark could feel Lex’s cock *everywhere*, in his hand and against his own cock, and he found himself shuddering, gasping to keep up with Lex’s rhythm.

Lex’s leg wrapped around his hip, urging him on, harder and faster than he’d ever gone before.

That was probably why, when he came, it was more intense than *anything* he’d ever experienced. It felt the way his eyes had that first time that his heat vision had set the classroom on fire, except all over, waves of fire and passion coursing through his blood until they all centered on one concentrated explosion of pleasure into Lex’s hand.

Just as he felt his own body start to come down, sleepy and contented, Lex’s began to shudder and Clark just had enough time to look down, to *see* Lex come all over their joined fists. With a final gasp and a whimper, Lex’s head fell to the pillow beside him.

Clark wanted to touch him, but his hand was sticky, and he felt kind of sweaty all over. “I think I need a shower.”

Lex opened one eye to look at him and smile. “Second best idea I’ve heard all day.”

Clark didn’t need to be told what the best idea had been. He was in full agreement on that point.

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Clark hadn’t been able to fight his smirk when he’d looked at his reflection in the mirror. Lex’s casual assertion that he thought he might have some clothes that would fit Clark didn’t fool him in the slightest. The black slacks hugged his ass just a bit too well, and the blue-green, tight fitting t-shirt just ‘happened’ to be the exact color of his eyes. Lex eyed the ensemble hungrily when Clark entered the kitchen, as if he’d dreamed of Clark dressed just like that all his life. Yeah, no *way* was all this just coincidence.

“You seem fully recovered.” Lex craned his neck around to follow Clark’s ass as long as he could before Clark sat down in the seat across from him.

“They were just little splinters, so I guess it just took a day,” Clark shrugged before digging into his pancakes.

Lex took a strawberry between his teeth and began nibbling lightly. “The airports are open again. Apparently, your mother caught a flight at 7:15 this morning. Enrique decided not to inform me since, and I quote, I had ‘gentleman company’.”

Clark grinned at that and poured on more syrup. “That was nice of him.”

“I can only hope he would’ve had the common sense to keep your mother from walking in on us.”

Clark snorted, half amused, half horrified at the thought.

“I give her another fifteen or so minutes before she’s knocking at the door. If the roads were clear, she’d undoubtedly be here by now.”

Clark mumbled his agreement and downed half his glass of milk in one gulp. When he looked up, he saw that Lex was giving him a funny look. “What?”

Lex coughed and gulped. “Milk mustache,” he finally explained, voice sounding strangled as he did so.

Clark laughed and wiped his mouth clean, which caused Lex to groan. There were definite advantages to this whole flirting thing. There were advantages to the whole sex thing too, like he really *could* taste Lex, straight from the source, if he wanted to. If his mom weren’t coming over, he might suggest that they try it then and there.

Lex had, in the meantime, taking to ripping off little pieces of toast and eating them one at a time. “I need to know what will happen when she gets here,” he said quietly.

Clark sighed. “I’ll probably have to go home. She’ll want to fuss. A lot.”

“Ah.” Lex took a sip of coffee, which seemed to be the only substance he was consuming in any significant quantity.

Silence extended between them just long enough for Clark to realize that something was wrong. “Lex?” he finally asked warily.

“I know the drill by now.” Lex half laughed to himself. “I didn’t see anything unusual. What was it this time, do you think? Knock on the head? Hysteria from the attack? Temporary hallucinations brought on by too much lust?”

“Knock it off, Lex,” Clark said angrily.

Lex stopped and stared at his plate with mild distaste.

“You didn’t see anything,” Clark repeated.

“Of course.”

“Because I haven’t shown you even a *fraction* of what I can do yet,” Clark finished.

Lex looked up at him in surprise.

“I have to see my mom,” Clark insisted, “but I *will* come back this afternoon. And, when I do, I think it’s time I showed you *everything*.”

Lex considered that thoughtfully for a moment. “Are you sure that’s a wise idea?” he finally asked, sounding somewhat surprised at himself for even asking. “I haven’t been the best of friends, of late.”

Clark reached over and covered Lex's hand with his own. "Neither have I. But you saved me, took care of me when it mattered the most."

"That doesn't mean—"

"It's more than enough for a second chance."

"Shouldn't I be on my fifth or sixth chance by now?" Lex teased lightly.

Clark grinned back. "So am I. But who's keeping track?"

Lex raised their interlocked fingers until his lips brushed Clark's knuckles. "I don't even begin to know where to warn you about how this could go wrong."

"Why don't we worry about that if it happens?" Clark retorted. "And, in the meantime, worry about how to make things go *right*."

Lex just smiled, softly and quietly and half to himself, but he made no further argument.

In the end, he was as tired of fighting as Clark was.

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